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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that if bidialectal education is to be seriously contemplated for Aboriginal Australians, it should be considered with more than the surface structures of dialectal difference. Bidialectal education programs must be underpinned by an understanding of the meanings carried by Aboriginal English and the processes of interpretation that Aboriginal English speakers are likely to bring to standard English. The paper summarizes work done at Edith Cowan University, Australia, related to bidialectal education, explaining that the university uses the catchphrase "the ABCs of bidialectal education" to refer to three elements that are essential in a comprehensive bidialectal education program: A (Accept Aboriginal English), B (Bridge to standard English), and C (Cultivate indigenous ways of approaching experience and knowledge). This paper focuses on cultural imagery, which constitutes the mental images that, for people in a culture, comprise the world that they respond and relate to both in language and in other social behavior. After describing cultural imagery and bidialectal Aboriginal Australians and discussing research approaches to cultural imagery, the paper presents four initiatives, including the following: revitalizing standard English, exploiting cultural schemas, employing bidialectal communication tasks, and making instruction more comprehensible for dialect speakers. (Contains 16 references.) (SM)

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Apprehending and Appropriating Cultural Imagery in Bidialectal Education

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Aboriginal Students and Bidialectal Education

The twentieth century was, for most Aboriginal Australians, one in which education, as provided for other Australians, in one way or another excluded them. The exclusion was at first overt, in that Aboriginal people were widely considered ineducable. After a little more than a century of European occupation of their land the Indigenous people were so diminished in numbers and in spirit that it was assumed that the only future for them was extinction- either by dying out or by being bred out (Elkin 1979). During the 19th century the main schooling opportunities for Aboriginal students had been those provided by missions. Even though, in 1880 it became law in New South Wales for Aboriginal children to go to school, the law was not enforced and little changed (Partington 1998). Early in the 20th century the view prevailed that Aboriginal people of mixed blood were best separated from their parents and, in Western Australia, a "Chief Protector" appointed by the state became the legal guardian of all such people up to the age of sixteen. This led to many Aboriginal children being separated from their parents and produced much trauma and little motivation for education. During the 1930s the policy of assimilation came into vogue, a policy which avoided facing the fact of Aboriginality and certainly paid no regard to particular educational needs on the part of Aboriginal children, but rather expected them to transform themselves into the likeness of the majority.

Throughout all this time a distinctive variety of English was being maintained in Aboriginal communities. From the earliest days of the colony, Aboriginal people had limited access to and interaction with the immigrant society and their English, at first the product of pidginization, and, in some places, creolization, developed its own unique character which reflected Aboriginal history, experience and values. It was not until the 1970s that Australian linguists started to draw public attention to the existence of Aboriginal English and to suggest that bidialectal education, or "teaching standard English as a second dialect (TSESD)" should be developed to meet their needs (Kaldor, 1977).

In the last decade of the 20th century a number of initiatives supportive of bidialectal education emerged (Hudson 1992; McRae 1994; Malcolm 1995; McKenry 1996). Although much school practice remains based on the assumption that there is only one English relevant to education and that is the standard English of the education providers, there has been a clear movement towards the recognition of Aboriginal English in society at large and in some schools and education offices. The dawning of the 21st century holds much more hope for educational inclusion for Aboriginal people- now a vigorously growing minority within the Australian population- than did that of the 20th century.

It is the argument of this paper that, if bidialectal education is to be seriously contemplated for Aboriginal people, it should be concerned with more than the surface structures of dialectal difference. The problems posed by standard English to Aboriginal people relate less to matters of linguistic difference than to matters of identification and conceptualization. It is necessary for bidialectal education programmes to be underpinned by an understanding of the meanings carried by Aboriginal English and processes of interpretation that Aboriginal English speakers are likely to bring to standard English.

For a number of years, as a theme for teacher development, the team I am associated with at Edith Cowan University has used the catchphrase "the ABC of bidialectal education" to refer to three elements which we see as required in a comprehensive bidialectal education programme:

A Accept Aboriginal English
B Bridge to Standard English
C Cultivate Indigenous ways of approaching experience and knowledge (see, e.g., Malcolm 1995).

It is the third of these objectives which has required us to find ways of exploring the cognitive dimension of Aboriginal English more fully. In order to do this, we have turned to the works of such writers as Chafe (1994), Langacker (1987) and, in particular, Palmer (1996).

Cognitive linguistics proposes that an account of human language must be concerned with the management of concepts, images and symbols rather than with the management of linguistic forms in their own right. Palmer (1996) brings together the cultural interest of the ethnography of communication and the conceptual interest of cognitive linguistics and suggests that both language and culture derive from a common base in

imagery. It was Palmer's work that alerted us to the possibility that Aboriginal students might be working from a conceptual basis that was shared by their culture and their dialect but which was not shared by the standard English of the school system. This we saw as one way of accounting for the fact that Aboriginal students, while making a positive early response to schooling, typically fall behind in the middle primary years and lose confidence in their ability to handle school learning, often complaining of the "big words" in which it is expressed.

The remainder of this paper will summarise some of the work we have done, based on this assumption, first to apprehend the cultural imagery which informs the dialect and culture of Aboriginal students, and second to appropriate this cultural imagery for purposes of education.

What is Cultural Imagery?

Cultural imagery essentially constitutes the mental images that, for people in a culture, comprise the agreed world that they respond to and relate to both in language and in other social behaviour. It does not necessarily correspond to an objective reality, but it is the reality that people imagine when they live out their lives and carry out their discourse in the world. For Palmer, "Cultural linguistics and cognitive linguistics are essentially theories of mental imagery. They seek to understand how speakers deploy speech and listeners understand it relative to various kinds of imagery. Some of these kinds are cognitive models, symbols, image-schemas, prototypes, basic categories, complex categories, metaphor, metonymy, and social scenarios" (Palmer 1996:46).

The main source of cultural imagery is the experience of the world transmitted to us by our senses. Experience informs the imagination and the resultant imagery underlies both our view of the world and our language. "In my own view," Palmer says, "language is the play of verbal symbols that are based in imagery. Imagery is what we see in our mind's eye...Our imaginations dwell on experiences obtained through all the sensory modes, and then we talk" (1996:3). So language and culture have a common source in schemas which are mental representations of the world. "It is likely," according to Palmer, "that all native knowledge of language and culture belongs to cultural schemas and that the living of culture and the speaking of language consist of schemas in action" (Palmer 1996:63).

Although the source of cultural imagery is experience of the world, it is transmitted to members of a culture by language and other cultural behaviour. The perceptions of the individual are, in the words of Palmer, "framed and filtered by imagery" (1996:49). We might perhaps illustrate this from Western Anglo culture in the fact that we see the "sun go down", we perceive "time passing", we imagine "a heart full of love" or passions being "contained" and we associate smoothness and slipperiness with words starting with a sibilant followed by a lateral consonant. "The term *imagery*," says Palmer (1996:46) "highlights the fact that concepts originate as representations of sensory experiences, even though they may subsequently undergo complex processes of formation and recombination. The prototypic function of imagery is to represent the environment, even though images seldom correspond directly to all the objectively definable features to be found there."

Although cultural imagery is maintained in a culture, it is not fixed for all time. It changes. As members of the community engage in discourse they depend upon conventional imagery but they are also capable of bringing in new imagery. Discourse is a creative process in which, to quote Palmer (1996:6), "speakers in language communities collaborate and negotiate over the imagery of evolving world views. Old or new, unwanted ideas are filtered out. New imagery and language emerge together."

Imagery seems an unpromising concept for scientific investigation. Yet it is possible to study language systematically in a way that places the image as central. This is the enterprise of cognitive linguistics. Some cognitive linguists focus upon some units of language and some on others. For example, Sweetser (1990) has, in some of her work, focused productively upon vocabulary, Chafe (1994) upon discourse, and Langacker (1987) upon grammar. According to Palmer, imagery underlies all aspects of language right down to its phonology and he has illustrated how language may be analysed in terms of its imagery at all these levels.

Imagery may be revealed when, for example, native speakers are asked to explore the associative connections between words, or to give prototypes (or best examples) of given categories of object. Images also show, of course in metaphor and metonymy and in the frames used for the understanding or representation of social or narrated events.

Cultural imagery is particularly influential on speakers in the way in which they adopt particular genres for oral narrative in talking about the events of their own experience. A genre, against the background of this theory, may be seen as a realization at the discourse level of one or more event or story schema.

Cultural Imagery and the Bidialectal Aboriginal

The theory of cultural linguistics and the concept of cultural imagery offer new possibilities for the understanding of the linguistic and educational behaviour of Aboriginal people. The dialect of English which prevails in Aboriginal community contexts has a long history of separate development from the Australian English which emerged among the settler population. Australian English is indeed a unique variety of English and reflective of distinctive Australian environmental conditions and shared values. However, it is the result of the convergence of a number of existing English traditions. Aboriginal English came into being in conditions of language contact where non-English and English traditions came into oppositional contact. Many Aboriginal languages were lost during the period of the development of Aboriginal English through processes of pidginization and sometimes creolization. There was, then, a potential vacuum, in terms of the linguistic bearer of cultural imagery, which the new Aboriginal forms of communication developed through contact were capable of filling.

What I am suggesting here is that, for Aboriginal Australians, the cultural imagery which was shared by language and culture before English came on the scene, continued to be shared by language and culture when, under the impact of the invasion experience, traditional languages were lost and English, by way of contact varieties, came to be adopted as an Aboriginal means of communication. On this understanding, I would suggest that the "English" which formed the lexical frame for the early pidgin and creole was lexically English but, in large part, semantically Aboriginal. The languages which ceased to be spoken did not "die." They had an ongoing existence through relexification with English. Aboriginal English, which is normally reserved for intra-group communication among Aboriginal people, has become for them a culturally congruent means of communication because it embodies Aboriginal imagery, values and world view. By contrast, standard English, as taught in the schools, bears the cultural imagery of the non-Aboriginal population and is alienating and confusing to Aboriginal students in school, resulting in underperformance and early drop out.

Apprehending Cultural Imagery

The research team at Edith Cowan University consists of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal members and we have developed research approches which constantly bring us to terms with the fundamental conceptual differences between Aboriginal English and Australian English. With the help of Aboriginal members of the team, we elicit naturalistic speech from Aboriginal speakers interacting with other Aboriginal speakers. Tape recordings are transcribed collaboratively and checked by Aboriginal English speakers. The recorded discourse is divided into self-contained segments which are reduced to single-clause units placed on separate lines on a transcript. This becomes the subject of interactive analysis and interpretation with Australian English and Aboriginal English speakers sitting around the table. These interactions constitute the engine room for our encounter with the contrasting cultural imagery of the two dialects.

At the discourse level, we seek to find the schemas underlying the oral narratives which Aboriginal speakers employ when speaking about their own experience. We have found (Malcolm and Rochecouste 2000) that a small number of culturally salient schemas constantly recur, among which are: *Travel, Hunting, Observing* and *Scary Things*. We have compared the oral narratives of urban with those of country-dwelling Aboriginal speakers and we find that, even where the non-Aboriginal culture is most dominant, the cultural imagery expressed in the schemas persists, though, as Palmer would have predicted, it also undergoes some modification (Malcolm 2000). It is interesting that a traditional schema, like Hunting, may be used to organize the depiction of a non-traditional event, like a football game.

At the lexical level it is possible to apprehend cultural imagery by eliciting chains of association among lexical items. Many of the distinctive chains of association may be followed up by examining the entries in an Aboriginal English dictionary, like Jay Arthur's *Aboriginal English: A Cultural Study* (1996). We have also carried out investigations informally in in-service work with teachers and Aboriginal Education Officers and it has been found that, with some items, the level of correspondence between the word associations of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal informants is low. For example, 'kangaroo' was found in one investigation to associate with food and family outings for Aboriginal people but with tourists and national symbolism for non-Aboriginal Australians (See further Malcolm et al 1999). Lexical association is currently being used as the basis for an investigation at PhD level by Farzad Sharifian at Edith Cowan University.

Another way of investigating cultural imagery at the lexical level is to invite speakers to give examples of items belonging to a particular category, like 'bird', or 'furniture' or 'holiday.' Participants are invited to make a list of examples and then order them from the best to the most marginal ones. The best example of a particular category constitutes the prototype and is the mental image which the speaker is most likely to focus on when the word is used. We have found that there is little correspondence between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal informants with respect to some prototypes.

It is also possible to pursue cultural imagery by studying the morpho-syntax. Palmer notes that, for example the article 'a' evokes, at least to him, "the abstract image of a countable thing" (1996:53). It is interesting that the distribution of the article 'a' is different in Aboriginal English from standard English, perhaps suggesting less unambiguous underlying imagery with regard to countable and uncountable entities. In the same way, the importance of certain grammatical functions like the marking of past tense, the distinguishing of genders and the distinguishing of 3rd person singular from other subjects, are demoted, suggesting that there may be different cultural imagery involved.

Appropriating Cultural Imagery

We return, then, to that objective of two-way bidialectal education which we referred to earlier: cultivating Indigenous ways of approaching experience and knowledge. Having appropriated cultural imagery, we can use it to make education more meaningful and more inclusive to Aboriginal students and to raise the awareness of non-Aboriginal students of the richness of the culture that has been maintained in Australia by its original inhabitants.

It goes without saying that, if educators are to appropriate the cultural imagery of Aboriginal people for bidialectal education they need to be aware of that cultural imagery. This means that much more research needs to be done using the theoretical framework of cognitive and cultural linguistics to enable more of the cultural imagery which underlies Aboriginal English to be made known. Until this is the case, teachers will continue to interpret Aboriginal English on the basis of their own cultural imagery and misunderstand it. The research needs to be undertaken in collaboration with teachers and educational authorities so that it will flow into teacher development which will enable the knowledge to be effectively applied to pedagogy.

We are still at the beginning stages of making such applications, but I wish to suggest four initiatives which can be taken:

1. Relativizing Standard English

Standard English is often taken, even by educators, to be "English" and other varieties, such as Aboriginal English to be dialects. Thus in Australia I have found even the advocates of bidialectal education to refer to the approach as teaching "English as a second dialect" rather than teaching *standard* English as a second dialect. One of the ways in which cultural imagery from the first dialect can be used is to show the relativity of the way in which standard English organizes experience. Standard English genres follow certain assumptions about the linear progression of experience and the irrelevance of context which are not universal and are not shared by the genres of such varieties as Aboriginal English. Students should be exposed to genres which show the relativity of the assumptions about life which are embedded in standard

English. This is important for the enlightenment of the mainstream students as well as for the better inclusion of the non-standard dialect speakers.
It is also possible to deconstruct the ways in which metaphor operates in standard English and to experiment with different metaphors drawn from the non-standard dialect. For example, the world view expressed in Aboriginal English shows a greater affinity between the animate and the inanimate elements in the environment than is recognized in standard English.
Aboriginal English also tends to merge the categories of extent and excess, so that "too much" in Aboriginal English would be interpreted as "very much" in standard English. Discriminations of this kind and their implications could be explored in a non-judgmental way, showing that experience allows for interpretation according to a range of forms of verbal imagery.

2. Exploiting Cultural Schemas
Secondly, it is possible to exploit the cultural schemas which underlie Aboriginal conceptualization and expression to enrich the education of all students. Aboriginal art draws on the same cultural imagery as does Aboriginal English and it has found worldwide acceptance. Teachers can draw attention to the ways in which the same schemas, such as the very pervasive *Travel* schema may be expressed graphically and verbally. The non-linear nature of the artistic expression might help non-Aboriginal students to understand the non-linear nature of the verbal expression in some genres.
It is also appropriate for teachers to help students to understand the alternative schematic structures which underlie discourse forms which are commonly used with Aboriginal English but do not occur in standard English. Oral discourse skills are developed to a high level among many Aboriginal children according to our data, but such skills normally do not gain recognition because such elements as parallelism, repetition, direct speech switching and suspensory pitch elevation (to name but a few) are not a part of normal communicative competence among Western people. The art of Aboriginal English narrative expression should enter into education both as content knowledge and as a vehicle for expression by Aboriginal students on the appropriate occasions.

3. Employing Bidialectal Communication Tasks
It is commonplace that the learning of English as a second or foreign language is enhanced by communicative classroom activities which involve the use of the target language by students with one another to achieve meaningful communicative ends. The learning of a second dialect bears some comparison with the learning of a second language (although not in all respects) and it is important to use the kinds of skills which promote language learning where they are relevant. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians are not, in most cases, used to ongoing and intensive interaction. The classroom can provide opportunities for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal members of the class to exchange meanings and to learn from one another how to understand one another. For this, the well known task-oriented activities of information gap exercises and jigsaw tasks, which both involve the overcoming of a knowledge gap by having students get information from one another, could help students to become aware of the cultural imagery which separates them. Similarly, there is a place for role play exercises, where students can step into one another's shoes.

4. Making Instruction More Comprehensible for Dialect Speakers
One of the observations Donna Christian made in her Educational Practice Report on two-way bilingual education (1994) was the importance of making instruction comprehensible for those who were learning by medium of a non-native language. Although bidialectal learners are not learning in another language, the problem of incomplete comprehension of teacher language is a real one and it is important that it should be addressed. The comprehension of Indigenous students will be improved through a greater emphasis on cooperative learning and peer interaction, which relate better to the cultural imagery in which education is involved in life rather than formalized in lessons. Learning should also be made more hands-on with the student having chances to make mistakes on the way to learning and not being always in an intimidating testing situation. And the skills of Aboriginal students in receiving messages from their environment should be made relevant to education wherever possible, with learning being multi-modal and contextualized in the life environment.

Conclusion

I have attempted to present an approach to bidialectal education which gives as much importance to understanding and using the non-standard dialect speaker's approach to experience and learning as to the acquisition of alternative linguistic forms. In order to make such an approach possible it is necessary, in my view, to enlist the help of cultural and cognitive linguistics so that the cognition which unites the learner's first dialect to an associated cultural milieu can be understood. When this is done, the cultural imagery the student possesses can be enlisted to support attempts to make schooling in the standard language accessible and acceptable. I am convinced of the relevance of this to the Australian Aboriginal scene and I suggest that it may also have relevance in other settings.

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